
**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE –
ANNUAL REPORT 2009/10**

1. The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee are pleased to present their Annual Report to Council.
2. The Committee would like to thank the Lead Officers over the year George McQueen, Assistant Director , Planning and Resources and currently, Andrew Dunn, Assistant Director, School Improvement and Development, Children's Services Department, Allison Carling and Karen Graves from Democratic Services, and the many officers of the Council who have assisted us with our work during the year.
3. Special thanks are extended to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Councillor Cyndi Hughes and for her hard work and dedication as Chair of this Scrutiny Committee over the past years. Also thanks to our previous Cabinet Member, Jenny Chapman.

School Developments

4. The Committee have continued to follow the progress of various school developments over the year and these have included :-

The re-build of North Road Primary School which was opened on time in January, 2010;
and

The building of St. Aidans Academy which was completed on time and on budget in September, 2009.

5. Members of this Scrutiny are also delighted that the Council's bid to bring forward the Building Schools for the Future Programme to Wave 7 has been successful and detailed work is now being commenced with Partnerships for Schools, the body responsible for the allocation of all capital funding, and with stakeholders in Darlington on the rebuilding or remodelling of Branksome, Hurworth and Longfield Schools.

Service Planning and Service Plan Performance Monitoring

6. Members received the Services Plans that this Scrutiny have responsibility for and continued to scrutinise and monitor the four service plans including those elements of the Sustainable Community Strategy 'One Darlington : Perfectly Placed' and the Local Area Agreement for which this Scrutiny have responsibility. The four service plans for which the Committee are responsible are Children and Families, Partnerships, Planning and Resources and School Improvement and Development.

School Admissions

7. We received an update on the 2009 intake for school admissions for both primary and secondary schools across Darlington. The report also summarised the admission process for 2009/10 intake.

Childhood Obesity

8. We have been keeping a close watch on what has been done and what needs to be done to tackle childhood obesity in Darlington and gave consideration to the draft Strategy 'Preventing Obesity, Promoting Physical Activity in Children and Young People in Darlington (2009-2012)'. This strategy highlights the problem of obesity in children and young people and what needs to be done locally to prevent obesity and to develop services to treat obesity and the local action plan provides the opportunity to deliver and monitor services to address childhood obesity in Darlington.

Childcare Sufficiency Review 2008/09

9. We received a report to outline the brokerage service that has been developed by the Early Years Partnerships Team to ensure children with disabilities are matched with appropriate childcare placements and to include the provision of support and guidance to settings around providing a good quality, inclusive and sustainable childcare service to parents.

Alcohol/Substance Misuse Related Education for Children and Young People

10. Members continue to examine the existing provision and planned developments for educating children and young people in Darlington about alcohol and drug misuse and the key developments in relation to the prevention and treatment of associated problems. This Scrutiny Committee will also be working closely with the Director of Public Health to undertake some work in scrutinising and monitoring the National Support Team for Alcohol's visit to Darlington and other educational and health issues surrounding teenage smoking and passive smoking.

The Protection of Children in England

11. As a key role of this Scrutiny Committee we continue to receive regular updates and arrangements in place for safeguarding children in Darlington and arrangements in place with the Local Safeguarding Children's Board to ensure close links with the Children's Trust and other local authorities and agencies.

Outdoor Play Areas

12. We received an update on play area improvements and planned improvements over the next two years to develop 22 play areas in Darlington. At the special meeting of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee where pupils were invited to attend from each of the primary schools (see paragraph 20 below) officers took the opportunity to seek the views of the young people to take into consideration when planning improvements utilising the £1,128,558 funding secured from Play builders to improve play areas over the next two years.

School Standards

13. The Scrutiny Committee continue to monitor school standards and received a report on cumulative standards of attainment and achievement recorded by schools in Darlington in 2009 national tests. We were pleased to learn that overall performance in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile for children had improved; Key Stage 1 school performance was up in 9 out of the 11 indicators and regionally, Darlington is the most improved; at Key Stage 2 results are above the national average and again we are the most improved authority. At Key Stage 4, improvements have also been made in the percentage of pupils achieving five or more A* to C grades. Members have been encouraged by the improved results and will be looking for continued improvements.

Pupil Transition from Primary to Secondary School

14. We have examined the existing provision and planned developments for school pupil transition from Key Stage 2 to 3. Transition Groups were initiated during the Summer of 2008 to improve the transition experience for pupils moving from primary to secondary school and the work on the project “One Book for Darlington” project completed in Autumn 2009 which informed curriculum development. The Transition Action Groups also met to look at developing the use of Summer Schools and the summer school pilot groups will implement changes in the Summer 2010. Officers also took the opportunity of seeking the views of primary school pupils at the Local Democracy Week Special Meeting to gauge views and fears and inform on transition worries for primary school pupils (see paragraph 20 below).

Destination of School Leavers

15. We also receive statistical information regarding school leavers, which highlights their destination into either full time education, work based training, employment with training, employment other, or not in education or employment. Members were pleased to learn that out of 1304 school leavers for 2009, 81.8% were in full time education, 7.7% in workbased training and 3.1% in employment with training.

The work of the Connexions Service, established in 2000, is key to providing young people with the offer of learning when leaving Year 11 or aged 17 who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). Currently Darlington is 80th out of 150 Local Authorities for its NEET performance target.

Admissions to Schools Annual Report to the Schools Adjudicator

16. Members received the Annual Report 2008/09 which is agreed by the Local Admissions Forum and must be submitted to the Schools Adjudicator. It was pleasing to note that this authority slightly exceeds the national average of percentage of first preferences being met.

Integrated Working

17. We received a report on the development of integrated teams aimed at improving early intervention and prevention services in Darlington. Under the Children’s Act 2004 there is a requirement on the local authority, with its partners, to improve the outcomes for

children and young people by reviewing services and how they are provided, including the integrating of services. We have requested future reports to keep the Members updated on the impact of integrated services on children, young people and families.

Sex and Relationship Education Policy

18. At the request of Members, a report was presented on how sex and relationship education was being delivered across the Borough. The report outlined the continuous programme of education that is being developed accordingly with external professionals and partnership working to ensure the best way of working for the young people and children.

Local Democracy Week

19. A Special Meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee was held on 12th October, 2009 as part of this authority's celebration of Local Democracy Week. Two school children from each of the Primary Schools in the Borough were invited to attend the meeting, and 33 children attended in total. The children enjoyed a health buffet reception prior to the meeting, and met the Mayor, Members of this Committee and other senior Members and Officers.

The meeting was opened with an overview of the Committee and meeting protocols and then the children received presentations on Pupil Transition, Road Safety and Pedestrian Training and the Play Strategy and actively engaged and participated in these issues. The children then received certificates from the Mayor to mark their attendance. Overall it was a very successful and enjoyable meeting.

School Absence Figures and School Exclusions 2008/09

20. Members are regularly kept updated on the levels of school absences and on the level of fixed term and permanent exclusions and in both cases what is being done by the Council to improve the situation. Scrutiny Members are keen to visit the 'Turnaround' provision for primary students which opened in January 2009 and has had a positive impact on fixed and permanent exclusions. This visit will take place as soon as practicable to arrange with the Redhall Turnaround Centre.

Extended Schools Activities

21. Members of this Scrutiny Committee requested information on the work taking place in schools around Extended Services both nationally and across Darlington to promote the delivery and signposting to extended services. It is very pleasing to see that all schools are working towards developing their extended services to achieve full core offer status by September 2010, and these services include a varied menu of activities, childcare, parenting support, swift and easy access and community access to school facilities including adult learning, ICT and sports facilities.

Appointment of Co-opted Member

22. We have recently appointed Siobhan Lund to be a co-opted Member of this Scrutiny Committee and feel that Siobhan will be an asset with the wide knowledge she has of issues affecting children with special needs and their families.

Work Being Undertaken with Young People

23. We received a presentation from David Cox, The Forum Music Centre on the work he is involved with at the Forum involving young people.

The Forum was established in May 2004 and provides recording, rehearsal and performance facilities and a creative space and an exciting social environment. Since opening the Forum runs a range of programmes and activities for young people and adults which include Newblood Live which is a Live Music Event for 13 to 17 year olds which attracts a full house, hosting Durham Music Services and Darlington and Dales Youth Orchestra, Darlington College BTEC, activities for learning difficulties, community events and various workshops and activity programmes. Over the past years The Forum has been developing into a high technology creative environment and David outlined to the Members how the Forum had evolved and its plans for the future which ultimately is to become an independent learning centre (academy) specialising in vocational learning and business and enterprise growth.

Changes to Post 16 Education

24. We examined the impact on this authority of the changes to post 16 education and post 16 education providers. As from 1st April, 2010 responsibility for commissioning of learning provision for young people transferred from the disbanded Learning and Skills Council to the local authority. The responsibility for commissioning training for learners aged 19 and over transfers to the new Skills Funding Agency (SFA).

Ofsted Inspections of Children's Homes and Short Break Centre for the Disabled

25. Members of this Scrutiny are pleased to note that the Ofsted Inspections carried out since July 2009 on three children's homes have been deemed to be a sound provision and the short break centre for disabled children deemed a strong provision and Ofsted found areas of strength in every setting. The full Ofsted report was presented at the meeting for Members information.

Annual Unannounced Inspection of Contact, Referral and Assessment Arrangements within Children's Services – Outcome of Inspection

26. We were also pleased to note that following an unannounced inspection by Ofsted of the contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Children's Services which took place during January, 2010, there were no areas for priority action highlighted. The full Ofsted Report was presented at the meeting for Members information.
27. We have undertaken various Reviews and Task and Finish Review Groups over the last Municipal Year and these have included :-

Multi Use Games Areas (MUGA's) Review – Members have met on a number of occasions now to examine the use of Multi Use Games Areas within the community,

which is inconsistent across the Borough, and have now been advised that officers in Cultural Services are working closely with the locality Co-ordinators in Children's Services to produce a document for schools, containing information to sit alongside the Community Use Agreements. The information contained in this document will cover insurance details, pricing recommendations and charging policies, booking recommendations. Hopefully this will help the schools and alleviate some of the problems with opening up the MUGA's for community use. Members will meet again to examine this document in more detail.

Language Learning Task and Finish Review – Members have been examining the provision of language learning in the community (adult education) and language learning in schools. Members are also trying to ascertain the level and areas of need in regard to language learning as this was a priority for children, parents and the community as a whole. Ruth Bernstein, Head of Libraries and Community Learning presented to Members the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Action Plan which was approved at the Scrutiny meeting held on 26th April, 2010 and resolved that action plan demonstrated that no further work was required by the Group into adult language learning provision at this time.

School Standards Task and Finish Review – All Members of the Scrutiny Committee were invited to meet to examine current standards within schools and the outside factors which may have an effect on them and also to look at work being undertaken to address these issues. Members will meet again to look at statistical information on Secondary Schools.

Internet Safety Task and Finish – Following the recent tragic event of Ashleigh Hall, a student at Darlington College whose death came about through a social networking site, Members initiated an urgent Task and Finish Review to examine internet safety. Members of the Group examined the security measures in place currently in schools and colleges within the Borough including stringent filtering systems; future plans for the safety of young people; resources currently available to advise children and young people on internet safety and made appropriate recommendations to Cabinet regarding the provision of internet safety advice to all children, young people, parents and carers. Cabinet at its meeting on 1st December, 2009 supported and endorsed the recommendations made by this Scrutiny Committee.

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee